

## **Belarus**

Report by

Alla Stashkevich

Head of the Laboratory of Museology and Museum Activity

Belarusian State Institute of Culture Issues

### **Introduction – Key Issues**

The museum statistics in Belarus as a part of the general statistics on culture forms and concentrates in the Department of Documentation and Statistical Analysis of the Belarusian State Institute of Culture Issues. Every year, this Department gathers data from the state and regional museums of a system of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus, submitted by them according to the specially elaborated questionnaire. On the basis of these data, the Department makes annual reports for the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Statistics.

Except for statistical reports, the Belarusian State Institute of Culture Issues periodically (one time in three years) issues analytical reports on museums which are prepared by the Laboratory of Museology and Museum Activity. The Laboratory takes part in the elaboration of the statistical questionnaire for museums which is reconsidered every three years. The questionnaire contains several sets of data:

- general information on museums (name, address, profile, subordination, information about museum branches, number of museum buildings and their technical condition, etc);
- information about museum collections (name of collection, number of objects, number of inventoried objects, information on the computer database, existence of a conservation workshop, number of restored museum objects and of those which require restoration);
- information concerning the museum visiting (number of visitors according to their categories);
- information about museum activity (permanent and temporary exhibitions, number and character of museum educational actions, etc);
- data about museum staff (general number and number of the professionals, their qualifications, experience, etc).

Unfortunately, for today we have only the data concerning of state and regional museums of the system of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus. But besides these museums, in Belarus there is a network of museums of other departments, and so-called "people's" museums, museums of public organizations and school museums all belonging to the nonprofessional museum institutions. The information on them is not fixed in any way. The Laboratory of Museology and Museum Activity of the Belarusian State Institute of Culture Issues since 2000 began to collect material about these museums. In 2005, we are going to issue the first directory of such museums.

### **Definition of Museum**

The Law on Museums and Museum Collections of the Republic of Belarus accepted on September 5, 1996 defines museum as “the research and educational institution of culture accessible to visiting. A museum collects, studies, exhibits, popularizes and preserves a movable and separate immovable historical and cultural heritage, promotes the increase of erudition of the people, the spread of knowledge about the person and its environment, serves for spiritual development of a society”.

### **Existence of Museum-related Laws**

The Law on Museums and Museum Collections of the Republic of Belarus of 5 September 1996 determines the substantive provisions of the state museum policy. In particular it defines the order and conditions of creation and registration of museums. Such conditions are:

- existence of movable historical and cultural values;
- existence of the building corresponding to the museum purpose and requirements of safety of its collections;
- existence of necessary financial and material means for the maintenance of the museum activity.

The law in detail describes rights of museums and social guarantees of their employees (art. 22, 24), and also rights and duties of citizens concerning museums (art.23).

Articles 5-12 are devoted to museum collections. They define a structure of collections, rights of their owners, procedure of the formation of collections, system of the state inventory of movable and separate immovable monuments, and also opportunities of museums on preservation and restorations of museum values.

### **Categories used regarding Type of Collection**

According to the Belarusian tradition, all museums, depending on the value of their collections, their size and territorial scope, are classified as follows:

- National museums and collections;
- Regional museums and collections;
- Local. museums and collections.

The typology of museums according to their profile includes the following categories:

- Complex museums (based on the different types of collections);
- History, including war-history and museums of local history and culture;
- Art
- Ethnic;
- Archaeological;
- Literary and literary-memorial;
- Natural history;
- Ecomuseums;
- Museum-reserved;
- Science and technical;

### **Categories used regarding Type of Ownership**

The Law on Museums and Museum Collections considers that following patterns of ownership, all museums are subdivided (art. 13):

- the museums based on the property of the Republic of Belarus (the Republican property);
- the museums based on the property of the administrative-territorial formations;
- the museums created by enterprises, institutes, organizations;
- the museums based on a private property.

### **Existing Data – Basic Figures and Diagrams**

On the statistical data for 01.01.2004 in Belarus, the ramified network of museum institutions operates. It consists of state and regional museums of the system of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus (189 museums; 131 museums among them are independent organizations, and 58 are their branches), museums of other departments (precise number of them is unknown, but approximately they are 100), museums of public organizations and school museums belonging to the nonprofessional museums (about 1.000) and 2 private museums.

From the typological point of view, the museum network of Belarus is differentiated in sufficient variety. The distribution of profile groups of the Belarusian museums is following: museums of local history are about 50 %, historical (including folk and ethnic museums) 17 %, art museums 18 %, literary and literary-memorial 10 %, museums of territories (ecomuseums, museum-reserves) 2 %, natural history museums 2 %, others 1 %.

#### ***Collections***

The total number of items in museum collections of Belarus<sup>3</sup> is 3.671.292.

27 % of the collections are kept in the state-owned museums. Further on the regions: 18 % in museums of Vitebsk area; 15 % in museums of Grodno region; 11 % in the Gomel area; 11 % in the Brest area; 9 % in the Mogilyov area; 9 % in the Minsk area. The biggest collections are those of the

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<sup>3</sup> This quantity is underlined in the statistical reporting of museums of the system of the Ministry of Culture. The data of collections concerning other museums are not fixed.

National Museum of History and Culture of Belarus (266.782 items), Vitebsk (188.773 items), and the Grodno (164.545 items) regional museums.

Keeping in mind that during the Second World War the Belarusian museums have suffered serious losses (by estimation of experts after this war museum collections of the Belarusian museums kept no more than 15.000 items, while before the war museum collections contained about 4 million items) it is possible to estimate the results of the really big work of the Belarusian museum specialists on returning and updating of museum collections.

In the system of the Belarusian museum collections today the greatest share makes archaeological (17,5 %) and numismatic (16 %) collections. Further on the statistical ladder there are the collections of old-printed books and rare printed editions (13 %), documents (12 %), ethnic materials (10 %), the weapons (7 %) and others. Of art sources, the most representative is the collection of graphics (more than 100.000 items). Not a very numerous collection is that of hand-written books - only 511 items.

The statistical data testify to an insufficient intensity of the studying of museum collections by the Belarusian museums. Only 50% of museum collections have been inventoried. They also show that the majority of museums, as before, forms and keeps the museum information on paper carriers which is ineffective. The computerization goes slowly. For today, only 30 % of the museums have an electronic database for the collection management.

### ***Museum Visiting***

The statistical data testify that a significant crisis of museum visiting in Belarus has taken place in the beginning of the 1990s, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the formation of the independent state. During this period, we could observe a strong recession of museum visiting which before had always been focused on a service to tourists from the former Soviet republics. After 1991, the share of the internal tourism in Belarus was reduced to 80 %.

So, in 1990 the Belarusian museums were visited by 3.586.000 persons and in 1994, the number of visitors did not exceed 2.610.000 persons, though the museum network of the country had increased by 28 museums in this period.

From 1995 to 2001, some increase of the museum visiting was observed. In 2001, the Belarusian museums have accepted 3.810.000 visits. Properly, they have reached and exceeded the parameters of 1990. It has been connected with the expansion of the social sphere of the museum influence and the activization of its exhibition activity. Until 2001, the process of the museum reorientation to the interests of the local community has come to an end, the new forms of cultural-educational activity of museums based on the new approach towards visitors developed more actively.

The general number of visitors in the end of 2003 is 3.392.000 persons. Most of all visitors came to the state-owned museums - 30 % of all.

### ***Museum Staff***

The analysis of the statistical data shows the annual growth of the number of museum employees in the country. In 2003, in 189 museums there were 2.950 museum employees.

The majority of museum employees is in the capital - Minsk (934) which is natural because here there is the greatest concentration of large museums. So, one National Art Museum has 261 specialists. In Minsk, there is the biggest number of employees per museum - 72. On the average in the country, this parameter is 22,5.

Among the overall number of museum employees, the post of a curator is occupied by 896 specialists, that makes 31 % of the overall number of employees.

If to address the social-demographic characteristic of museum staff, we shall notice that the profession of museum curator is basically female. Only 13,6 % of all specialists are men, the other 86,4 % are women.

53,6 % of museum employees are of the age of 31 to 45 years, more than 21% of museum specialists are in the age of 30 years. Thus, about 75 % of museum employees are people full of energy and with a high potential. People of more mature age (46-55 years) make 19 %, and than 55 years 7 %. It was possible to find out, that the majority of museum employees (about 59 %) are true to their profession and have worked in a museum more than 10-15 years. At sociological interrogation, 180 employees of museums interrogated with experience of more than 6th years, only three would like to change work because of an insufficient level of wages.

**List of References**

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